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# Rome

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## Rome · *Casey Finch*

He was civilized and grievous. On the thin,  
uncelebrated day he died, the sparrows flew out  
like an opened fist, dragging the invisible sky  
behind them. The sparrows flew out in idiotic  
formation, as in cartoons, and together sang  
an old and awkward song; though out of it came  
nothing. For in the provinces the chained and  
frozen rivers did nothing when the news of it  
arrived. The aqueducts stood, as always, immovable  
in the televised wind. No fire dismantled the  
olive groves. No roads began to break apart

or disappear. He was civilized and grievous.  
He used to intercept the orders the wind gave  
to the trees, to string the stars themselves  
into a corrupt astrology that placed at the  
center of the tiniest, most distant things  
his sword and shining brow. But on the  
unrecorded day he died, nothing was stolen or  
noticed. No one wrote a single elegy or tugged  
madly at his tiny hair. No satellites swerved  
from their marvelous orbits across the Roman sky.

He was gifted and good to look at. He was  
civilized and grievous and lean. He used to  
stand at the control board of battles, to stare,  
magnificent and horny, at the borders of  
countries whose names he could not pronounce,  
and there decide what of the earth he would push  
aside and what he would build into another,  
lousy road. But on the day he died, the poems  
and the lies he commissioned returned to nothing,  
hollow now and useless. Nothing was harmed or  
misplaced. No quarrels were interrupted. And

in the afternoon no provinces gathered to form a geography of mourning. It was impossible to dislike or ignore him, for he drank too much and wept at his own happiness. It was impossible to forget the beautiful, inconsistent language he pushed down the throats of his enemies. He was civilized and cheerful. He was

beautiful and abrasive and worthy. But when he died, when the good times became too good to untangle, nothing bore his body on a shield or broadcast the news of it to the provinces. Nothing replaced the vending machines he set up at the crossroads. And, in the end, nothing came down on a wind from the Pyrenees and dropped leaves into his wide, ridiculous grave.